



NEWS RELEASE

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SBA OUTLINES INITIATIVE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, COMMITS TO HIRING 300

WASHINGTON -- A new committee established at the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) will focus its efforts on ways to enhance business opportunities for people with disabilities, SBA Administrator Aida Alvarez announced today.

Administrator Alvarez announced the formation of the committee to mark *National Disability Employment Awareness Month*.

"I want to ensure that the SBA takes the necessary action to address the challenges that people with disabilities encounter in their attempts to establish or expand a business," Administrator Alvarez said. "The first step is to understand fully what those needs are in order to increase access for people with disabilities to our entrepreneurial development, lending, and procurement programs. We now have the mechanism in place for this critical task with the establishment of the *SBA Committee to Advance Employment and Business Opportunities for People with Disabilities*.

"Our goal is to reach *all* Americans who can benefit from the agency's programs and services," Administrator Alvarez underscored as co-chair of the President's *Economic Incentives and Entrepreneurship Committee*.

The *SBA Committee to Advance Employment and Business Opportunities for People with Disabilities* is a response to Clinton-Gore Administration directives to expand economic opportunity for people with disabilities. It consists of SBA senior-level management from key program, policy, and administrative offices. Its mandate includes the development of a strategic plan, during a 90-day review and consultation period with SBA affiliates and resource partners, with recommendations on how to improve program service delivery for people with disabilities.

The committee will also review the agency's policies in recruiting, hiring, training, and promoting people with disabilities. The SBA already has committed to hiring 300 individuals with disabilities over the next five years to meet the goals outlined in the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) plan, *Accessing Opportunity: The Plan for Employment of People with Disabilities in the Federal Government*.

Earlier this year, the SBA appointed Jeanette Harvey as special advisor for the agency on disabilities issues. Ms. Harvey, who uses a power wheelchair, is tasked with outreach to public and private sector partners and the development of small business education, training, and counseling for people with disabilities.

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Ms. Harvey is also the co-chair designee of the President's *Economic Incentives and Entrepreneurship Committee* and a member of the *Expanding Employment Opportunities for Young People with Disabilities Subcommittee*. She was also the 1998 chair of the *Blue Ribbon Committee on Entrepreneurship and Disability*.

It is estimated that there are 53 million Americans with disabilities with an aggregate income to exceed one trillion dollars by 2001. Also, it is reported that 12.2 percent of people who experience a work disability are self-employed, compared to 7.8 percent of people who do not have a work disability.

Additional information about SBA's programs and services is available at SBA's Web site: <http://www.sba.gov> or by calling the SBA's Answer Desk at 1-800 U ASK SBA.

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